



Opened ARMS

A good dataset is a treasure trove, capable of testing the most mundane and expected hypothesis (which can, instead, prove the unexpected) and testing complicated conjectures (which can uncover systematic relationships that untangle complex problems). Such is the character of data from the Agricultural Resource Management Survey (ARMS)—a broad information system obtained through an annual USDA survey and used by many inside and outside of USDA.

ARMS is the only national survey that provides observations of field-level farm practices, the economics of the farm business operating the field (or dairy herd, poultry house, etc.), and the characteristics of the household operating the farm—all collected in a representative sample.

Starting this September, when ARMS data collected for the year 2003 will be released, more people will have easier access to the dataset and the data will, for the first time, have statistical reliability at the State level (for 15 major agricultural States*) as well as at the national level. That means that States can assess, as ERS does for the Nation, such things as which characteristics elevate the top performing farms, how farm households divide their time among farm and nonfarm endeavors, what farm practices are gaining favor (and with what apparent returns to adopters), or exactly who needs financial or technical assistance. ARMS data are summarized to inform policy and program decisions at the State and national levels, as well as for agricultural businesses.

Thanks to new software and data management procedures, researchers in cooperative relationships with ERS will have desktop access to customized data summaries. These enhancements will make analyzing natural resource, technology adoption, farm business, and farm household issues less costly and more efficient. The same innovations will permit National Agricultural Statistical Service (NASS) State offices to produce customized data summaries for their customers.

Data are valuable only to the extent that they can be put to practical use, and are quickly available in the appropriate form and format, upon demand. Improvements in data access coming this fall will make ARMS data tremendously more valuable, while maintaining the strong disclosure and data security features that protect survey respondents.



Katherine Smith
Director, Resource Economics Division
Economic Research Service

* Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin.

Interested in exploring ARMS data? Visit www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/arms/ for background, description, and currently available data summaries. To stay informed of new data availability and access options, subscribe to the ARMS Update newsletter at www.ers.usda.gov/updates/.